

POLICY ON AWNINGS
LOWELL HISTORIC BOARD
Adopted February 9, 2004

Historic Context

- Historically used on many commercial buildings in Lowell, operable fabric awnings serve both functional and decorative needs. They were common in early Lowell where shop windows faced the sun and were primarily intended to protect shoppers and window displays from intense sunlight. Prior to the widespread use of air conditioning, awnings served an extremely functional role by keeping the interiors of structures shaded from the heat of the sun. Because the appearance of awnings can have a significant impact on the appearance of individual storefronts, buildings, and the overall streetscape, the Lowell Historic Board has developed guidelines to assist applicants in proposing awning installations consistent with their historic, functional use. The following policy is intended to clarify and elaborate upon existing Standards.

Applicability

- Consistent with their historic functional purpose, awnings are only allowed on sunny sides of streets and must be operable/retractable so that they may be used as-needed on a daily basis to shield from sun and allow closing in windy weather. Thus, they are intended to be changeable rather than fixed architectural elements. Inoperable metal framed or rigid plastic awnings are not compatible with historic storefronts and are not allowed.
- Awnings at entries will only be considered if the particular nature of a certain entry requires shading of window displays and customers. Normally it is expected that commercial entries be recessed from the street to provide that protection.

Design

- Awnings must be designed to project over individual bays and not be continuous features extending over walls and masonry, wood, or iron piers.
- Traditional cord-operated shed configuration and lateral arm sloped awnings are allowed. Bubble, dome, quarter round, convex, and concave shapes are inconsistent with the historic architecture and are prohibited.
- Cord-operated awnings must be mounted on the wood or metal framing within the opening and not on the surface surrounding the opening, and when open are expected to repose to a 45 degree angle and project at least four (4) feet horizontally; if more projection is desired, slide arm and chained balance awnings will be considered. Cleat locations must be above the hinge point of the awning. All frames must be fabric sleeved. All frame and fittings must be threaded or bent galvanized metal stock. All related hardware must also be galvanized. Only specified awning cord and pulleys are allowed. Hardware and fitting samples will be required and fabricated awning will be inspected and approved in shop prior to fabrication of additional units and installation.
- Crank-operated or lateral arm awnings must be mounted on a panel atop the shop window that is separate from the main signboard above. Hardware, frames, and housing must be of a dark bronze or black color. Hardware samples will be required and fabricated awning will be inspected and approved in shop prior to fabrication of additional units and installation.
- A minimum clearance above sidewalk level of seven (7) feet to the lowest part of the awning frame (not including valance) is required for pedestrian clearance.

Materials, Color, & Graphics

- To select an awning design that is appropriate to the architecture of a building, it is important to consider color and material selection. Awnings must be of acrylic woven fabric, which is available in a wide variety of solid colors and striped patterns. Aluminum, fiberglass, vinyl, and plastic awnings as well as materials stretched taut over a rigid framework are not appropriate and not allowed. A material, color, and pattern sample must be submitted and approved prior to procurement.
- Awning color or striped pattern must complement the building's façade. Historically, awnings with a solid color or striped awnings combining two or three colors were most popular in downtown Lowell. Valances must be of the traditional scalloped pattern.
- Awnings should also be coordinated for color, pattern, and height with other nearby awnings.
- The valance area was often decorated with the name and street number of the business in appropriate lettering. Awning signage will not be considered to be the primary or permanent signage and will only be considered in combination with permanent signage reviewed and approved on the building. Letters or numbers included on the valance cannot exceed $\frac{3}{4}$ of the height of the valance. Messages elsewhere on the awning are not allowed.
- Awnings with back-lit graphics or other kinds of internal-illumination are not allowed.

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